The Castle of the Soul: A Jungian Commentary on Suhrawardī's *Reality of Love*

By

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Two Worlds Meet

In the twelfth century, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (1154–1191), the Master of Illumination, composed visionary treatises that weave philosophy, myth, and mystical experience into a unified imaginal cosmos. Among these, the *Reality of Love* (*Ḥaqīqat al-ʿIshq*), preserved through Persian transmission and translated into French by Henry Corbin in *L'Archange empourpré* (1976), stands out as a concentrated allegory of the soul's drama. Here Beauty (*nīkūʾī*), Love (*ʿishq*), and Nostalgia (*shawq /andūh*) are personified as primordial siblings, and the human journey unfolds through their interplay. Adam and Joseph appear as archetypal figures, the Castle-Fortress of the Soul (*Shahrastān-e Jān*) serves as psychic topography, and the culmination is the encounter with the Sage who guards the Water of Life.

From a psychological perspective, this narrative is strikingly consonant with what Carl Gustav Jung (d. 1961) described as the process of individuation—the unfolding of the psyche toward wholeness under the guidance of archetypes. Jung was himself fascinated by myths and visionary recitals, regarding them as spontaneous symbolic productions of the unconscious. His method of *amplification* treated such narratives as manifestations of the collective unconscious in culturally specific form.

The aim of this essay is not to collapse Suhrawardī into Jung, nor to secularize his mystical theosophy, but to stage a dialogue: how does the *Reality of Love* appear when read as a psychodrama of archetypes? What might Jungians gain by encountering an Islamic illuminationist map of the psyche? And what do readers of Suhrawardī gain when they recognize that his allegory resonates with psychological structures still discernible in modern depth psychology?

Archetypes of the Primordial Triad

At the center of Suhrawardī's cosmogony lies a luminous triad: Beauty, Love, and Nostalgia. Each arises from the Intellect (*ʿaql*), which is itself the first creation of God. These three are not arbitrary abstractions but personifications of psychic principles. From a Jungian standpoint, they constellate archetypes of the collective unconscious.

1. Beauty (*nīkūʾī*)

Beauty is presented as the firstborn, the radiance of form. She is sovereign, enthroned, and immediately recognized as ruler by the angelic hosts. Psychologically, Beauty corresponds to the **anima archetype** in its numinous aspect: the imaginal feminine image that mediates the Self. For Jung, the anima is both guide and danger: she enchants, seduces, and elevates. Beauty in Suhrawardī functions precisely so—drawing the soul toward higher realities, yet also binding it to the image. Beauty is the archetype of the form through which transcendence becomes visible.

2. Love (*ʿishq*)

Love is described as Beauty's elder brother and eternal companion, unable to detach from her gaze. He is the principle of adhesion, movement, and passion. For Jung, Love here corresponds to **eros**, the psychic energy or libido that seeks connection, union, and ultimately wholeness. Love's smile generates "sparks," angelic beings, echoing Jung's insight that libido, when constellated by archetype, spawns manifold symbolic images. Love is both generative and disruptive; he collides with the fortress of Adam and laments. He is the restless dynamism of the psyche.

3. Nostalgia (*shawq / andūh*)

The youngest sibling, Nostalgia, suspends Love and introduces sorrow. She is longing, distance, and the pain of separation. From a Jungian lens, Nostalgia is the **transcendent function**, that psychic capacity to hold opposites in tension until a new symbol emerges. Nostalgia is the bridge between consciousness and unconsciousness, between what is and what is not yet. She embodies both grief and hope, the restless

dynamis that prevents premature closure. In Jung's terms, she is the function that allows individuation to unfold.

Archetypal Dynamics

Together, this triad illustrates a psychic law:

- **Beauty** (image of perfection) constellates the archetype.
- **Love** (eros/libido) binds the ego to it, generating movement.
- **Nostalgia** (transcendent function) introduces lack, distance, and thus opens the field of transformation.

This is structurally homologous to Jung's understanding of symbolic life: archetypal image (*anima/animus*), libido as drive, and the transcendent function holding tension of opposites. Suhrawardī, however, dramatizes this as a myth of cosmic birth.

Adam and Joseph: Archetypes of the Self

Suhrawardī's *Reality of Love* does not leave the triad of Beauty, Love, and Nostalgia suspended in the heavens. Their drama is woven into the story of humanity itself, and here two figures dominate: **Adam** and **Joseph**. Each, in Jungian terms, represents an archetypal manifestation of the **Self**—the totality that transcends and encompasses the ego.

Adam: The Anthropos Archetype

Adam is described as the new being composed of four hostile natures (the four elements), enclosed in a six-sided prison (the body). The rumor of his creation excites the angelic hosts, and Beauty descends first to enthrone him.

- **Jungian reading:** Adam is the archetype of the *Anthropos*, the primordial human in whom opposites are compacted. He is both terrestrial (four elements) and

celestial (crowned by Beauty). For Jung, this figure corresponds to the Self in its *uroboric* or original wholeness—a wholeness not yet differentiated.

- The "prison with six sides" recalls the **cube**, symbol of the bounded material world. The ego first encounters itself as trapped in oppositions (hot/cold, moist/dry), which demand reconciliation.
- Beauty embracing Adam "until no empty space remained" dramatizes the archetypal truth that the human form is wholly permeated by the imaginal; the ego is never without the Self's image shining through it.

Adam's enthronement is thus the first stage of individuation: the recognition that the human being is already a synthesis of above and below. Yet Love crashes into this fortress and laments, and Nostalgia suspends him—symbols of the inevitable psychic conflict that follows incarnation.

Joseph: The Beloved Child

If Adam embodies the first human totality, **Joseph** is the archetype of the Self revealed in history. When Beauty joins herself to Joseph, Love and Nostalgia follow. Joseph is not merely a patriarch; he is the *chosen youth*, radiant and envied, thrown into exile, imprisoned, yet exalted.

- **Jungian reading:** Joseph is the *puer aeternus* in his divine aspect—the eternal youth who is also the hidden king. In dream analysis, such figures appear when the psyche discloses its center: dazzling, magnetic, but fragile.
- Beauty's fusion with Joseph shows the Self's concretion: the transcendent archetype is no longer abstract but embodied in a single face. For Jung, this corresponds to the **Self-image in dreams and visions**—the moment when totality shines through the finite.
- Joseph's dream of the eleven stars, sun, and moon bowing before him (Qurʾān 12:4) is the Self's **mandala vision**. Jung remarked that such cosmic symbols

appear when the psyche approaches integration: the ego dreams the Self as a stellar center surrounded by planetary functions.

Thus, Joseph in Suhrawardī is not a historical personage only, but the vision of the Self as both beloved and sovereign, to whom all faculties (stars, sun, moon) prostrate.

Zolaykhā and Jacob: The Anima and the Senex

The Joseph narrative is framed by two dramatic companions: Zolaykhā in Egypt and Jacob in Canaan. Each corresponds to an archetypal polarity in Jung's schema.

- **Zolaykhā (Beauty's mirror):** She is the anima as temptress and initiatrix. Her tearing of the veil, her scandal, her obsessive passion—these are images of the anima's **destructive eros**, which strips the ego of its social masks. Jung would call this a stage in individuation where the anima disrupts adaptation, forcing the psyche into crisis. Yet Zolaykhā is also faithful: she becomes the one through whom Love is housed, and she ultimately guides the seeker toward Joseph.
- **Jacob (wise old man):** Blind Jacob, who calls his oratory the "House of Sorrows," is the senex archetype. His whitened eyes symbolize inner vision, the introversion that comes when outer sight fails. Nostalgia attaches to him: he is the one who embodies patience, mourning, and the slow work of fidelity. For Jung, this is the archetype of the **inner guide**, the old sage who interprets dreams and sustains longing until fulfillment.

Together, Zolaykhā and Jacob show the anima and senex as two poles of individuation: the disruptive passion that tears veils and the patient mourning that endures distance. Both are necessary to approach Joseph, the Self.

Splitting of Love and Nostalgia

At this stage, Love takes the road to Egypt, Nostalgia to Canaan. The psyche is split: eros seeks embodiment and passion, while longing adheres to mourning and absence. This is the archetypal separation between **desire** and **contemplation**.

In Jungian terms, the ego cannot yet reconcile eros and longing; libido bifurcates into outer attachment (Zolaykhā) and inner yearning (Jacob). Individuation requires that both paths eventually converge on Joseph, where Beauty is enthroned.

Joseph as Integration of the Self

When Jacob finally encounters Joseph and sees him enthroned with Zolaykhā, Nostalgia prostrates, and Joseph proclaims the fulfillment of his dream. This is the moment of **integration**: the anima (Beauty/Zolaykhā), eros (Love), and longing (Nostalgia/Jacob) are all united in a single vision.

For Jung, this is the climactic moment in individuation when disparate archetypes—the anima, the shadow of longing, the wise old man, the puer—are recognized as facets of the Self. Joseph is not merely a figure in a story but the **psychic center in its fullness**, radiating order and reconciliation.

The Castle-Fortress of the Soul (Shahrastān-e Jān)

The longest and most elaborate section of Suhrawardī's *Reality of Love* is the vision of the **Castle-Fortress of the Soul**. Here, the psyche is mapped as a city with three levels, five gates, a forest of beasts, an alchemical kitchen, and a source of eternal water guarded by a sage. For a Jungian, this is a treasure map of the **individuation process** rendered in medieval Persian symbolic form.

The City as Psyche

Jung often noted that the unconscious produces mandala symbols—circular cities, fortified castles, labyrinthine enclosures—to represent the Self. Suhrawardī's fortress is a direct example. The **walls** and **gates** symbolize psychic boundaries; the **knight** is the ego-consciousness, moving through trials; the **levels** and **chambers** correspond to layers of the unconscious. The castle as a whole is a **mandala of the psyche**, an imaginal construction of inner totality.

The Three Levels: Layers of the Unconscious

First Level: Water and Fire

- **Water-throne figure**: moist, receptive, but forgetful. This represents the psyche's **immediate sensory impressions**—they are absorbed but not retained.
- **Fire-throne figure**: dry, ingenious, but impure. This is the **phantasmic faculty**, producing lasting but distorted imaginations.

Jungian reading: This is the **personal unconscious**. Some contents are ephemeral (water), others fixate obsessively (fire). Both are unstable and must be passed beyond.

Second Level: Air and Vapor

- **Air-throne figure**: liar, chatterer, slanderer. This is the psyche's restless discursivity.
- **Vapor-throne figure**: alternating angelic and demonic forms, skilled in incantation. This is the psyche's **ambiguous imagination**, at once creative and deceptive.

Jungian reading: This is the **intermediate unconscious** where images flood consciousness. Jung would call it the field of **projection**. The psyche veers between inflation (angelic identification) and corruption (demonic seduction). The knight must brandish the sword—symbol of **discrimination**—to terrify these images.

Third Level: Earth

- **Earth-throne figure**: custodian of trusts, balanced, silent. This is the faculty of **retention** and **equilibrium**.

Jungian reading: This is the **ego-center of consciousness** in its mature form, capable of storing, holding, and balancing psychic material. The ego is now prepared to face deeper gates.

The Five Gates: Thresholds of Transformation

Gate 1: Black and White Lamps, Watchman

The alternation of black and white lamps evokes day and night, consciousness and unconsciousness. The vigilant watchman is sometimes absent, sometimes swift.

Jungian reading: This is the **gate of vigilance** (*muraqabah*). It represents the regulation of incoming thoughts (*khawāṭir*). Jung compared this to the necessity of "psychic hygiene": guarding against possession by intrusive contents.

Gate 2: Informer Galleries, Messenger

Messengers run back and forth, seizing forms, reporting them, but with discrimination.

Jungian reading: This is the **gate of dreams and inspirations**. The unconscious sends images (messengers) to the ego, but not indiscriminately—there is already a selective function. Jung would call this the **filtering activity of the unconscious**, which decides what surfaces.

Gate 3: Wind and Registrar

The Wind blows images everywhere; the Registrar regulates, preventing overload.

Jungian reading: This is the **gate of affect regulation**. Wind symbolizes the boundless imagination; the Registrar corresponds to **wisdom** (*ḥikma*) which limits excess. Jung often warned of psychic inflation when too much unconscious material floods the ego. The Registrar is the corrective.

Gate 4: The Spring and the Discerner

A throne in the middle of a cool spring, pearls scattered around, with a Discerner who orders contrary qualities.

Jungian reading: This is the **gate of the transcendent function**. Here the opposites (hot/cold, moist/dry) are balanced. Jung described the transcendent function as the psyche's innate capacity to reconcile opposites through symbol. The spring itself is the unconscious source, and pearls are insights crystallized from experience.

Gate 5: The Carpet and the Differentiator

A vast carpet spreads around the microcosm; the Differentiator judges eight contraries and sometimes rolls up the carpet.

Jungian reading: This is the **mandalic function of judgment**. The Differentiator is the archetype of Justice, capable of distinguishing subtle oppositions: joy/sorrow, hope/fear, union/separation. Rolling up the carpet symbolizes the eschatological act of withdrawing projections and returning to unity.

The Forest and Bestiary

After passing the gates, the knight encounters a forest where a **lion** (rage) and **boar** (appetite) ravage. The knight lassos them and casts them away.

Jungian reading: This is the **confrontation with the shadow**. Lion and boar are instinctual drives of aggression and desire, the twin powers of the *nafs ammāra*

(commanding soul). Jung emphasized that individuation requires the ego to confront, bind, and integrate shadow contents—not annihilate them, but prevent their tyranny.

The Alchemical Kitchen

In the same forest, figures cook, skim, and apportion. Some add fire, some separate subtle from dense, some distribute nourishment.

Jungian reading: This is **psychic alchemy**. Raw impressions (*prima materia*) are cooked by affect (fire), distilled into subtle insights, and apportioned according to function. This exactly parallels Jung's interpretation of alchemy in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*: the psyche transforms instinct into consciousness through imaginal operations.

The Sage and the Water of Life

At last, the knight reaches the great portal where the **Sage**, identified as "Eternal Wisdom" (*Jāvīdān Kherād*), greets him and offers the **Water of Life**. Whoever drinks from it comprehends the Divine Book.

Jungian reading: This is the **Wise Old Man archetype**, identical with Khidr, Sophia, and the Self in its guiding aspect. The Water of Life is the unconscious as source of renewal. Drinking it symbolizes full integration: the ego receives direct gnosis of the Self. Jung called this the highest stage of individuation, when the ego-Self axis is fully constellated.

The Inexpressible Higher Fortresses

Suhrawardī ends by refusing to detail the "higher castles" above the fortress, saying they would not be believed.

Jungian reading: This is the recognition of **psychic ineffability**. Archetypal experience transcends discursive capture. Jung, too, warned that encounters with the Self surpass rational categories and can only be expressed symbolically.

The Castle-Fortress is a mandala of the psyche. The knight (ego) passes from personal unconscious (three levels), through thresholds of regulation (five gates), confronts shadow (forest), undergoes transformation (alchemy), and finally meets the Self (Sage, Water of Life). Suhrawardī's map mirrors Jung's model of individuation almost point for point, but dramatized through Persian chivalric and mystical imagery.

Passionate Love and the Sacrifice

If the Castle-Fortress of the Soul offers a map of the psyche's structures, Suhrawardī's reflections on *ʿishq* (passionate love) and the sacrificial cow reveal the **dynamic forces** that propel the soul toward its transformation. Here eros is no longer a gentle bond; it becomes a devouring ivy. And the ego is no longer a neutral custodian; it is a raging cow that must be sacrificed.

Passionate Love as Ivy

Suhrawardī describes *ʿishq* with an unforgettable image: like ivy (*ʿashaqa*), it winds around the tree, feeding off its sap until the tree languishes.

- **Jungian reading:** Passionate love is the **libido's total fixation** on the Self. Like ivy, eros entwines consciousness so completely that the ego can no longer live on its own resources. This can appear destructive—ego withers—but it is also transformative. The tree is stripped of independent pride and returns to its archetypal root.
- Jung would compare this to the **death-rebirth motif**: passionate eros "kills" the ego's autonomy, but in doing so it re-centers the psyche in the Self. Just as alchemy speaks of the *nigredo* (blackening), where matter decays so that spirit may be born, so too *ʿishq* darkens the ego so that soul may shine.

The ivy's inexorable growth dramatizes the paradox: passionate love suffocates the ego but nourishes the Self.

The Depth of the Heart and the Excellent Tree

Suhrawardī situates this ivy around the "tree of slender stature" whose root is in the **depth of the heart**. He cites Qurʾān 14:29, where the "Excellent Tree" symbolizes the Good Word. The depth of the heart is watered by divine breaths, guarded by angelic lights.

- **Jungian reading:** The **heart-depth** is the imaginal ground of the Self. For Jung, the Self is not abstract but rooted in the *psychoid*—the deep structure that connects psyche and cosmos. Suhrawardī's Malakūt (angelic world) corresponds to this level.
- The ivy of *ʿishq* twining the Excellent Tree symbolizes how passionate love seizes the soul's very root. When the body-tree withers, the heart-tree flourishes eternally.

Here Suhrawardī shows how eros is not mere emotion but the **force of individuation itself**, which breaks bodily attachments to plant the soul in the divine garden.

The Yellow Cow: The Ego-Soul to be Sacrificed

Suhrawardī then turns to the cow (*baqara*)—a clear Qurʾānic allusion (Q 2:63, 66). He describes the carnal soul as a yellow cow with two horns, avidity and cupidity, deceiving in appearance yet destructive in essence.

- **Jungian reading:** The yellow cow is the **inflated ego**, driven by greed and desire, charming yet treacherous. Its two horns recall the ego's dual fixations: possession and consumption. For Jung, this is the **shadow of the ego**, the complex that resists individuation by clinging to power.
- Sacrifice of the cow = the **ego's surrender**. Jung stressed that the ego must "die" to its inflation if the Self is to emerge. In alchemical terms, this is the immolation of base matter so that gold can be refined.

Suhrawardī insists that not just any cow is fit for sacrifice: only one prepared by years of exposure to the sun, like a ruby forming in Badakhshān. Likewise, individuation requires long preparation; not every psyche is ripe for transformation.

Necessary Sacrifice as Archetypal Pattern

Suhrawardī now emphasizes that Love cannot dwell in the city until the cow is slain.

- **Jungian reading:** Love (*ʿishq*) as the Self's eros cannot inhabit the psyche until the ego's compulsive appetites are surrendered. This recalls Jung's statement in *Aion*: "The experience of the Self is always a defeat for the ego." Sacrifice is not optional; it is structurally necessary.
- The ego's horns of greed and lust mirror the lion and boar in the forest. What cannot be bound by lasso must finally be immolated by fire.

The sacrificial cow is thus the **archetypal scapegoat**, the ego-body itself offered so that spirit may descend.

Suhrawardī and Jung on Eros as Destruction and Renewal

Suhrawardī's dual imagery of ivy and cow captures the paradox of individuation:

- Ivy-love strangles the ego-tree → but roots the Self-tree in eternity.
- Cow-ego ravages the city → but once sacrificed, becomes the condition of Love's dwelling.

Jung would fully endorse this paradox. In *Symbols of Transformation*, he argued that libido must "consume" the ego's limited aims to redirect itself toward symbolic wholeness. In *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, he showed how alchemy's imagery of sacrifice, death, and corruption served as metaphors for psychic renewal.

Passionate love, then, is not a peripheral ornament of the psyche; it is the very energy of transformation. Without *ʿishq*, the fortress remains inert. Without sacrifice, Love remains homeless. Passionate love (*ʿishq*) is thus the soul's ivy, winding until the ego withers. The yellow cow is the ego's appetite, deceiving yet destined for sacrifice.

Together they dramatize the Jungian law of individuation: the ego must suffer defeat so that the Self may emerge. Eros, far from being sentimental, is the destructive-renewing fire that uproots the soul from temporal attachments and replants it in eternity.

Toward a Cross-Cultural Depth Psychology

Suhrawardī's *Reality of Love* is not an isolated artifact of Persian mysticism. It is a symbolic drama of the soul that resonates with the very structures Carl Jung uncovered in his work with Western patients, myths, and alchemy. Reading the two together reveals not only common archetypes but also complementary emphases.

Active Imagination and Visionary Recital

For Jung, one of the most vital tools in analysis was *active imagination*—letting psychic images unfold, then engaging them dialogically. Suhrawardī's *recitals* are exactly this: dramatizations of inner figures (Beauty, Love, Nostalgia, Zolaykhā, Jacob) and psychic landscapes (the Castle-Fortress, the Forest, the Sage). Where Jung's patients often produced visions spontaneously, Suhrawardī composed literary "laboratories" for such imaginal work.

Corbin called this the *mundus imaginalis*, a world between sense and intellect where archetypes take form. Jung would call it the collective unconscious. Both agree: transformation requires participation in this imaginal drama.

Archetypal Parallels

- **Beauty (nīkūʾī):** The anima archetype, guide and enchantress, the face through which the divine Self becomes visible.
- **Love (ʿishq):** Libido/eros, dynamic psychic energy, both destructive and renewing.

- **Nostalgia (shawq/andūh):** The transcendent function, the tension of opposites that births new symbols.
- **Adam:** The Anthropos, primordial totality compacted in human form.
- **Joseph:** The Self, dazzling and central, surrounded by the stellar mandala of psychic functions.
- **Jacob:** The Wise Old Man, senex, guide of patience and mourning.
- **Zolaykhā:** The anima as temptress and initiatrix, forcing ego to shed its masks.
- **Lion and Boar:** Shadow instincts of rage and appetite.
- **Sage at the Water of Life:** Sophia/Khidr, the Wise Old Man archetype, integration of the Self.

The correspondence is striking: Suhrawardī's visionary *dramatis personae* are archetypes that recur in Jung's casework and in myths across cultures.

The Castle-Fortress as Mandala

Jung stressed that mandalas spontaneously appear in dreams as symbols of psychic wholeness. Suhrawardī's fortress—with concentric levels, five gates, a central forest, and a Sage at its heart—is precisely such a mandala. It integrates spatial, moral, and spiritual functions: sensory faculties, imaginal functions, affect regulation, shadow confrontation, alchemical transformation, and final union with Wisdom.

The knight's journey through it is individuation mapped as a heroic quest. Where Jung's mandalas often appear abstract, Suhrawardī's is a **narrative mandala**, making explicit the ordeals required to move inward.

Passionate Love as Individuation Drive

Jung insisted that individuation is powered by libido, but he also warned against inflation and possession. Suhrawardī dramatizes the same paradox with the ivy of

ʿishq and the yellow cow of ego. Both show that love is not sentimental but devouring, not safe but transformative. Only through death of the ego's compulsions does the soul become fit for the eternal garden.

Thus, passionate love is not peripheral—it is the very dynamis of transformation. Jung's language of libido, Suhrawardī's language of love: two idioms, one archetypal law.

Toward a Shared Depth Psychology

What emerges is a cross-cultural depth psychology. Jung provides the analytic vocabulary—archetypes, shadow, anima, transcendent function, individuation. Suhrawardī provides the visionary drama—Beauty, Love, Nostalgia, Adam, Joseph, the Castle-Fortress, the Sage. Each illuminates the other.

For Western depth psychology, Suhrawardī expands the horizon: individuation is not only a personal process but a cosmic drama tied to angelic hosts, prophetic figures, and metaphysical light. For readers of Suhrawardī, Jung shows that these visions are not archaic fables only but living structures of the psyche, still operating in dreams and clinical encounters today.

Conclusion: The Eternal Story

Suhrawardī's *Reality of Love* is both myth and map: a cosmogony of Beauty, Love, and Nostalgia; a psychodrama of Adam, Joseph, Zolaykhā, and Jacob; an architecture of the Castle-Fortress with its gates, beasts, and Sage; and finally, a theology of *ʿishq* as sacrificial ivy. Read with Jungian eyes, this treatise is a profound allegory of individuation.

Beauty is the anima that lures, Love is the eros that binds, Nostalgia is the transcendent longing that opens the way. Adam and Joseph represent the Self in its primordial and historical aspects. The forest beasts are the shadow, the Sage the Wise Old Man, the Water of Life the Self's inexhaustible source. Passionate love both

destroys and renews, demanding the sacrifice of ego so that the soul may be replanted in eternity.

In Jung's words, "The experience of the Self is always a defeat for the ego." In Suhrawardī's imagery, the ivy strangles the tree and the cow is slain. But this defeat is victory: individuation is realized, the fortress of the soul opened, and the knight drinks the Water of Life. Thus, across centuries and civilizations, psyche speaks in the same tongue. Whether through Persian visionary recital or modern analytic dream, the archetypes reveal themselves. And what they tell, again and again, is the eternal story: that the soul is a castle, that Love is its fire, and that Beauty awaits within, enthroned.